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ARIZONA'S BAIT CAR PROGRAM CELEBRATES SEVENTH (7TH) YEAR ANNIVERSARY

PHOENIX – Arizona's Bait Car program celebrates its seventh year milestone this week and officials credit the program with helping drive down Arizona's auto theft rate to its lowest level since the mid-1990's.

Arizona's Bait Car program began as a pilot project in 2003 by a handful of Valley law enforcement agencies then soon expanded across the state using grant funds from the Arizona Auto Theft Authority (AATA) with vehicles donated by the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) and its member companies. NICB President and CEO Joe Wehrle stated, "NICB joins in congratulating the Arizona Auto Theft Authority and all Arizona law enforcement bait car users. NICB and its member insurance companies have supplied a number of these vehicles and they continue to prove their value in the fight against vehicle theft." Local NICB Special Agent and retired DPS Detective, Bob Owens has led their organization's involvement in Arizona by coordinating vehicle donations and working alongside statewide police agencies to assist programs.

"This proactive, joint partnership strategy has proven to be a successful law enforcement tool in Arizona and is one of several programs to be credited for auto theft being down 40% since the program launched in February 2003," stated AATA Director, Brian R. Salata. "It's a significant improvement for a Metro area (MSA – Metropolitan Statistical Area) that once had the dubious distinction of being the car theft capital of the U.S." In 2001, Phoenix and Tucson both reported over 1,100 car thefts per 100,000 people in their cities. In 2008, Phoenix MSA dropped to #19; Tucson dropped to #13 on the auto theft Hot Spots List for U.S. cities.

Bait cars are used by law enforcement agencies across the United States and Canada and have proven to be an effective tool in Arizona's auto theft reduction strategy. The Bait cars are deployed in strategic locations by law enforcement agencies. After a bait car is stolen, the location of the vehicle is monitored by police dispatchers through GPS tracking.

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Cameras and audio tapes are activated when the vehicle is entered; the dispatcher will coordinate a police response and once officers are in position, the vehicle and thief can be stopped. Hundreds of car thieves have taken the bait in the past seven years; case prosecutions have a 99% conviction rate.

Mesa Police Department was one of the first east valley agencies to pilot the Bait Car program in 2003, utilizing AATA's Law Enforcement Grant Program and vehicles donated by NICB. Mesa's Auto Theft Unit spearheaded the department's program, which to date, has nabbed 121 car thieves in the act. The program requires strategic coordination within the agency and among departments; for many years Detective Travis Metcalfe, a 25-year veteran with the department, has been the driving force behind their successful program. District staff and VIPS (Volunteers In Police Service) work closely with Detective Metcalfe to ensure the program's operational success. "The Mesa Police Department looks forward to continue our collaborative partnership with the AATA," stated Mesa Police Chief Vicki Myers. "Their support of our mission to reduce incidents of automobile theft in Mesa has been tremendous." Mesa Police Department reports a 37% drop in the city's 2009 auto theft rate.

"The AATA commends our many law enforcement partners for their innovation and dedication to reducing Arizona's auto theft rate by operating successful Bait Car programs, stated Brian Salata."

For additional information about Arizona's Bait Car Program and participating insurance companies, visit AATA's website at www.azwatchyourcar.com.

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